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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades there has been a rapid increase in the number of international students coming to study in the United States. While some recent studies have begun to examine the academic and career needs of international students, most of these studies did not directly compare the needs of international students to those of American students. This study was conducted to assess career and academic needs of incoming international students (N=215) and to compare those needs to needs of United States students (N=1,002). Two general patterns emerged from the results. First, international students expressed greater academic and career needs than did American students. Second, the rank-ordering of relative importance of the needs differed between the two groups. Job seeking skills and exploring job opportunities were ranked as relatively more important to American students than they were to international students. International students ranked the need to learn how to prepare a career and the need to see a counselor about career plans as relatively more important than did students from the United States. These findings suggest implications for counseling programs designed to help international students. (Author/NB)

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Summary

A sample of 215 incoming international students was compared to a sample of 1002 U.S. students on academic and career needs. Two general patterns emerged from the results. First, international students expressed greater academic and career needs than U.S. students. Second, the rank-ordering of relative importance of the needs differed between the two groups. Job seeking skills and exploring job opportunities were ranked as relatively more important to U.S. students than they were to international students. However, international students ranked the need to learn how to prepare a career and the need to see a counselor about career plans as relatively more important than did U.S. students.

Implications for counseling programs for international students were discussed.

Over the past few decades there has been a rapid increase in the number of international students coming to study in the United States. The number has risen from approximately 50,000 in 1960 to over 300,000 in 1980 (Open Doors, 1982). In spite of this increase, a survey conducted by the Institute of International Education has found that there has been a lack of any coherent policies toward international students among many major universities (Goodwin and Nacht, 1983).

Recent reviews of the literature have revealed that a large proportion of the existing research has focused on the adjustment problems of international students (Brain and David, 1971; Church, 1982; Hull, 1978; and Spaulding and Flack, 1976). Fewer studies have examined the needs of international students (Carter and Sedlacek, 1986; Collins, 1976; Culha, 1974; Hagey and Hagey, 1974; Manese, Leong and Sedlacek, 1985; Manese, Sedlacek and Leong, 1988; Stafford, Marion and Salter, 1978; and Tanenhaus and Roth, 1962). Some of the studies were doctoral dissertations and special reports and were thus not readily available to educators and student affairs professionals. Some studies examined only a few areas of needs among international students and did not utilize a more systematic and comprehensive needs assessment methodology (e.g., see Kuh, 1982). An exception to this pattern was a study conducted by Lee, Abd-Ella and Burks (1981), who performed a comprehensive needs assessment of foreign students from developing countries (e.g. Nigeria and Pakistan) or what are more commonly referred to as "third world countries." However, the Lee et al. study is now several years old, limited

in its population of foreign students, and less career and academically focused that it might have been. Comprehensive needs assessment surveys have been conducted on various student populations on campuses such as minority U.S. students (Webster, Sedlacek and Miyares, 1979), adult women (Smallwood, 1980), re-entry students (Lance, Lourie and Mayo, 1979) and married students (Flores, 1975). However, no similar study seems to have been done on career and academic needs of international students.

While some recent studies have begun to examine the academic and career needs of international students (e.g., Manese, Leong, & Sedlacek, 1985; Manese, Sedlacek, & Leong, 1988), most of these studies did not directly compare the needs of international students to those of U.S. students. Although studies of international students by themselves can be useful, comparisons to U.S. students provide data which are much more useful for planning differential programs for international students given their special needs.

The purpose of the present study was to assess career and academic needs of incoming international students using a needs assessment survey developed by Weissberg, Berensten, Cote, Cravey and Heath (1982) for college students, thus allowing for a comparison with U.S. students.

Method

A 25 item questionnaire assessing career and academic needs (Weissberg, et al., 1982) was administered to 215 incoming undergraduate international students at a large eastern

university during an orientation program. The sample was 52% male and 48% female, compared to 49% male and 51% female in the Weissberg, et al. (1982) study. Fifty percent of the present sample were immigrants, fifty-four percent were from South Asia and East Asia. Other areas represented were: Middle East (20%), Europe (10%), Latin America (5%) and Africa (4%). Data were analyzed using MANOVA ($p < .05$).

Results

The overall MANOVA was significant (.05) and Table 1 shows that 18 of the 25 needs were significantly different between U.S. and international students. Of the 18 needs which were significantly different, all of them were in the direction of the international students expressing greater needs in these areas.

Given that international students tended to express greater needs in all areas an additional analysis was conducted to determine if there were differences between the two groups in their rank-ordering of those needs. Kendall Tau correlations showed that there was no correlation between the ranks of international and U.S. students for both career needs and academic needs ($p < .05$).

Discussion

Two general patterns emerged from the present study. First, international students expressed greater academic and career needs than U.S. students. Second, the rank-ordering of relative importance of these needs was different between the two groups.

There are several possible explanations for international students expressing greater overall needs than U.S. students.

First, it is likely that international students genuinely have higher academic and vocational needs than U.S. students. This conclusion is quite consistent with other studies of the needs of international students (Collins, 1976; Hagey and Hagey, 1974; Lee, Abd-Elia and Burks, 1981; and Stafford, Marion and Salter, 1978). It also seems to confirm the common observation that international students tend to place a greater emphasis on the academic and vocational aspects of a college education than the social and extra-curricular aspects (Spaulding and Flack, 1976).

The second possible explanation is methodological in nature. The present needs assessment data were collected during an orientation program; a time when international students are given a great deal of information and may be experiencing high levels of anxiety, and therefore, higher levels of need for assistance. Until the present results have been replicated with other international students during other periods of their sojourn, the results should be interpreted cautiously. In addition, although a great deal of research has been done on international students, still relatively little is known about possible response sets and social desirability effects that may influence international students behavior in research studies. More research is needed in this area.

The greater level of academic and vocational needs expressed by international students calls for the development of additional programs and services for them. Besides increasing the number of programs, the quality and nature of these programs will also need

to be modified and designed in light of the special needs and priorities of international students highlighted in this study. Instead of hoping that the present counseling and advising services (which have been designed primarily for U.S. students) will meet the needs of international students, services tailored to their special needs will have to be developed if they are to be effective.

An examination of the similarities and differences in the pattern of needs between international and U.S. students reveals the special needs of the former group. While both groups indicated that their strongest vocational need was for work experience in their career fields, the career needs ranked second and third by the U.S. students were ranked eighth and seventh respectively by the international students (i. e., the need to explore job opportunities and the need to develop effective job seeking skills). The international students' lower need for career skills may be because seeking skills and job opportunities in the United States may not readily transfer to their home country. Instead the career needs ranked second and third by the international students were the need to learn how to prepare for the careers they were interested in, and the need to see a counselor about their career plans. The international students seem to be expressing needs for obtaining assistance with the special career needs and interests.

In terms of academic needs, the need to develop more effective study skills was ranked first by both groups. However, the international students also ranked the need to receive help

in selecting/scheduling courses as number one. The need to improve writing skills was also ranked highly by both groups with the international students ranking it third, and the U.S. students ranking it second. The need to become more comfortable in speaking up in class was ranked fourth by both groups. On the other hand, the U.S. students felt a relatively greater need to overcome anxiety about taking tests, ranking it third while the international students ranked it eleventh. The U.S. students also felt a higher need to understand how to use the library better, ranking it fifth compared to international students ranking it twelfth.

In general, the international students were less concerned about specific study skills such as using the library, taking tests, and taking better notes. Instead they were more concerned about their academic plans and expressed greater need for (a) help in selecting/scheduling courses (ranked first), (b) more help from academic advisors (ranked fifth), and (c) receiving help in establishing their academic program plan (ranked sixth).

There are several counseling implications from the present findings. Career counseling with international students should be done with recognition of their higher needs for individual discussions with counselors, information about career preparation, and lower needs for learning job seeking skills and exploration of job opportunities. For international students, the exploration of job opportunities within the U.S. may not be very useful since it is opportunities within their home country

that are important and relevant. Furthermore, directing international students to printed career information and resources may not be very helpful since this information pertains only to the United States. For example, asking an international student interested in becoming a psychologist to write to the American Psychological Association for more information may be misleading to the student. Within the United States, becoming a psychologist requires a doctorate, while this may not be true for other countries which may require only the Master's degree.

In terms of academic needs, educational counseling and advising with international students should focus less on the development of basic study skills but more on the development of the individual student's academic plan. This is because international students who have been selected to come to this country are already in possession of strong academic skills (Leong and Sedlacek, 1982; Spaulding and Flack, 1976). For example, in recent data released at the university where the study was conducted only 7% of the international students were dismissed because of poor academic performance as compared to 17% for Blacks, 14% for Asian-Americans and 8% for Hispanics.

International students have a greater need for individual counseling and consultation with advisors because they need to ensure that their academic and vocational training in this country will be appropriate and relevant to the circumstances in their home country. As such they have a great need for learning about the educational and occupational systems within the United States from advisors and counselors, and also how these systems

may be different from these at home.

Finally, a major methodological issue in the present study needs to be discussed. By using the data from the Weissberg et al. (1982) needs assessment study for comparison, it was assumed that the large university sample collected by Weissberg et al. (N = 1002) could serve as a norm group for comparison. Future research will have to be conducted to check the validity of this assumption. For example, inter-campus differences between the present data and the Weissberg et al. data could be an important mediating factor. Research examining the academic/career needs of international and U.S. student on the same campus may be helpful. Additional studies on the academic/career needs of international students using the Weissberg et al. (1982) Needs Assessment Survey would also provide data concerning possible differences between international student groups on different campuses. A continuing series of studies on the needs of international students using the same survey (Weissberg et al., 1982) would provide valuable convergent and divergent data concerning the academic, career, and personal needs of international students. Such a data base could prove to be an invaluable aid to understanding and meeting the needs of international students in the United States.

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Table 1:
Means, Standard Deviations, Ranks and Significance Tests Comparing
International and U.S. Student Career and Academic Needs

Variable	International (N=215)			U. S. (N=1002)		
	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
<u>Career Needs</u>						
1. To obtain work experience in career areas in which I am interested.	3.37	.79	1	3.28	.93	1
2. To explore job opportunities for people with my major.	3.08	.90	7	3.23	.92	2
3. To develop effective job seeking skills(i.e., interveiwing, resume writing).	3.09	.82	6	3.15	.92	3
4. To learn how to prepare for careers in which I am interested.	3.36*	.74	2	3.04*	.96	4
5. To explore my interests, values and abilities as they relate to my educational/career alternatives	3.15*	.87	5	2.85*	.96	5
6. To obtain information about a variety of career areas.	2.97	.85	8	2.81	1.00	6
7. To talk to a counselor about my career plans.	3.20*	.78	3	2.59*	1.05	7
8. To learn how occupations can affect my future way of life.	3.16*	.81	4	2.58*	1.05	8
9. To receive help in choosing or changing a major.	2.72*	1.07	9	2.20*	.96	9
<u>Academic Needs</u>						
1. To develop more effective study skills.	3.23*	.81	1	2.86*	1.00	1
2. To improve my writing skills.	3.19*	.87	3	2.71*	1.03	2
3. To feel less anxious when taking tests.	2.69	.98	12	2.61	.99	3
4. To become more comfortable in speaking up in class.	3.05*	.92	4	2.55*	1.10	4
5. To understand how to use the library better.	2.68	.93	13	2.50	1.06	5
6. To obtain more help from my academic advisor.	3.03*	.83	5	2.49*	1.08	6
7. To improve my math skills.	2.65	.99	15	2.49	1.08	7

	International (N=215)			U. S. (1002)		
	Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
<u>Academic Needs</u> (continued)						
8. To learn how to adjust to different teachers' expectations.	2.73	.92	10	2.48*	.98	8
9. To receive help in establishing my academic program plan.	2.98*	.86	6	2.44*	1.04	9
10. To improve my reading skills.	2.92*	.98	8	2.40*	1.09	10
11. To take better notes in class.	2.91*	.91	9	2.37*	1.00	11
12. To learn more about University/community services, facilities and events.	2.76*	.76	10	2.27*	.96	12
13. To receive help in selecting/scheduling courses.	3.23*	.72	1	2.26*	1.01	13
14. To get information about the majors offered at UMCP.	2.97*	.87	7	2.09*	1.06	14
15. To receive help in becoming involved in school activities.	2.68*	.75	13	2.06*	.98	15
16. To feel less anxious about mathematics.	2.20*	1.04	16	1.95*	1.07	16

* $p < .05$ using MANOVA

1 1=No Need, 2=Weak Need, 3=Moderate Need, 4=Strong Need

2 Weissberg, Berentsen, Cote, Cravey, & Heath (1982)